

Print and TV media representation of climate change: an Italian case study



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The newsworthiness of climate change

Climate change becomes a newsworthy issue especially when weather-related disasters strike.

TV and print media outlets across the world are “keen on” showing a cause-effect connection between such extreme events and climate change.

theguardian

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Typhoon Haiyan: we cannot afford to procrastinate on climate action

Anyone who continues to deny the reality that is climate change, I dare them pay a visit to the Philippines right now

- [Live updates](#)

Naderev Safo
theguardian.com, Monday 11 November 2013 12:13 GMT

 [Jump to comments \(3\)](#)



Typhoons start... here?

Environmentalists go even further in linking events like Haiyan with industrial processes responsible for greenhouse emissions.



UNFCCC talks after the climate disaster

- ✓ After a long series of inconclusive UNFCCC meetings, climate talks were held in the media spotlight.
- ✓ In spite of that, results were far below expectations. Why?
- ✓ Media interpretations of the results of the Conference differ widely.

The New York Times

World

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Deals at Climate Meeting Advance Global Effort

By DAVID JOLLY
Published: November 23, 2013

WARSAW — Two weeks of [United Nations](#) climate talks ended Saturday with a pair of last-minute deals keeping alive the hope that a global effort can ward off a ruinous rise in temperatures.

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Rich-vs.-poor nations' clash stalls work toward 2015 climate pact

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Environmental activists lampoon what they see as a lack of leadership in the fight against global warming, with protesters Friday donning the likenesses of French President Francois Hollande, left, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, President Obama and German Chancellor Angela Merkel in a demonstration outside the United Nations climate conference in Warsaw. (Czarek Sokolowski / Associated Press / November 22, 2013)



United Nations
Framework Convention on
Climate Change

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Tornadoes and climate change: is there a connection?

Scientists say: “global warming may end up making tornadoes more frequent or intense”but data aren’t conclusive enough.
...And the media aren’t sure either.



Global warming to blame for Midwest tornadoes and thunderstorms?

10:46 AM 11/18/2013

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Global warming has been blamed for dozens of devastating tornadoes and thunderstorms that ravaged America's Midwest this weekend.

Former United Nations adviser and economist Jeffrey Sachs tweeted out Sunday night that the severe storms that hit Illinois on Sunday were the result of human-induced global warming.

Why is it inherently newsworthy?

Also in “peaceful times” climate change is often in the news: controversial, loaded with environmental, economic, political, social implications.

Conflicting views as to:

- ✓ Timing of the consequences.
- ✓ Causes: how much man-made and how much nature-made?

Media attention can be influenced by weather fluctuations too.



High



Low

A pioneering work on the media and climate change

- ✓ 738 news stories on climate change from 1997 to 2007
- ✓ Four major national quality newspapers
- ✓ 116 TV news broadcasts in one year



Dramatization and climate change (1997-2007)

Climate change mainly framed in terms of dramatization: the Earth is doomed, no matter what we do to stop the global warming trend.



Rainfall and climate change (1997-2007)

- ✓ The press and TV broadcasts blaming climate change for heavy rainfall.
- ✓ Scientists still not conclusive about the connection.



Landslides, floods and climate change (1997-2007)

- ✓ When floods and landslides struck, climate change was singled out as the only culprit.
- ✓ Other, major contributing factors weren't even mentioned.

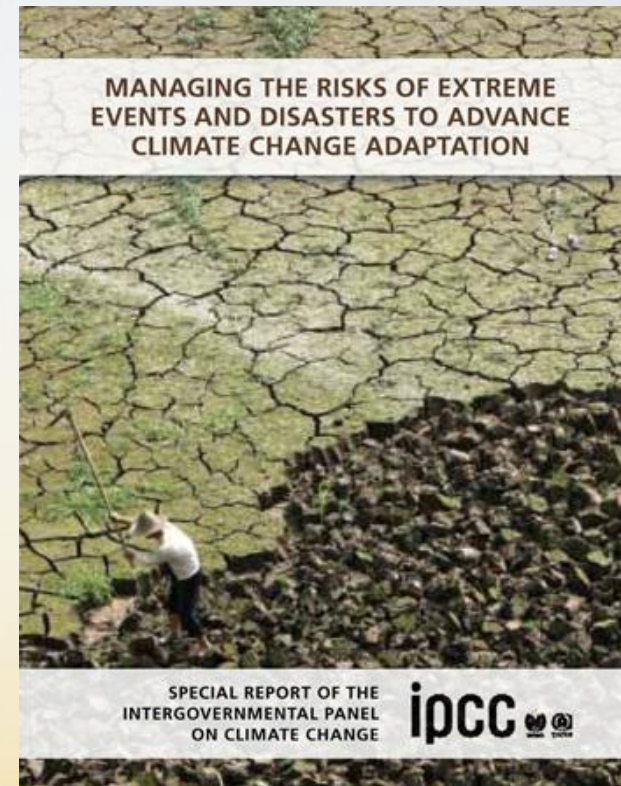
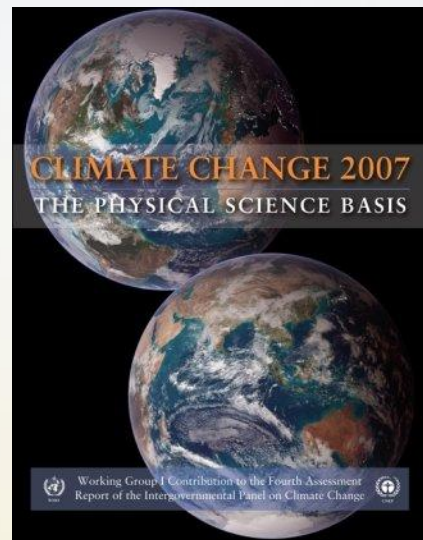
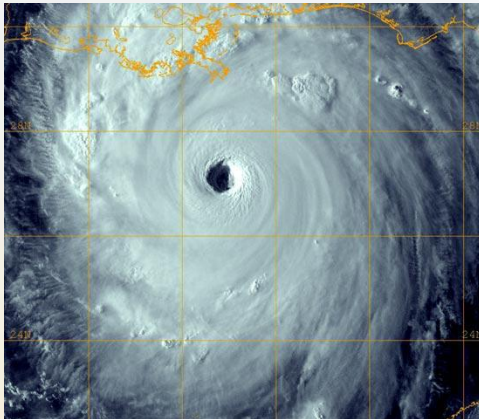


Hurricanes and climate change (1997-2007)

✓Hurricanes, cyclones and typhoons on the rise due to climate change.

✓“Attribution of single extreme events to anthropogenic climate change is challenging... There is low confidence in any observed long-term increases in tropical cyclone activity (i.e., intensity, frequency, duration)....”

✓News stories did not explain why climate change may worsen consequences of such extreme events.



Media framing of climate change: 2007-2010

Global and Planetary Change 90–91 (2012) 152–157



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How do the media affect public perception of climate change and geohazards? An Italian case study

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ABSTRACT

This paper uses a combination of a qualitative approach and a quantitative, software-based approach to explore the Italian print media construction of climate change and geohazards between 2007 and 2010. We have broken down our analysis in two sections: the first one deals with the coverage of climate change; the second one focuses on the media representation of hydrogeological hazards and extreme events in Italy.

Our software-based, qualitative and quantitative analysis of 1253 storylines from two major Italian broadsheets (the *La Repubblica* and the *Corriere della Sera*) has enabled us to assess the presence of typical journalistic frames such as conflict and dramatization, as well as newly-introduced ones such as "prevention vs damages", and "weather vs climate". Our results show that the two newspapers appear to have different "agendas" that might have different impacts on their own readerships: the *La Repubblica* has been on the forefront of forging a broad public consensus on the need for actions aimed at tackling climate change, whereas the *Corriere della Sera* has gradually built a journalistic agenda aimed at minimizing the urgency of the climate change problem.

As regards the media's representation of hydrogeological hazards, we have confirmed what assessed by previous research, i.e. that Italian journalists still prefer to focus on damages rather than prevention; on a better note, the tendency of the Italian press to confuse weather with climate, blaming climate change for extreme rainfalls causing landslides and floods, has decreased in the last four years.

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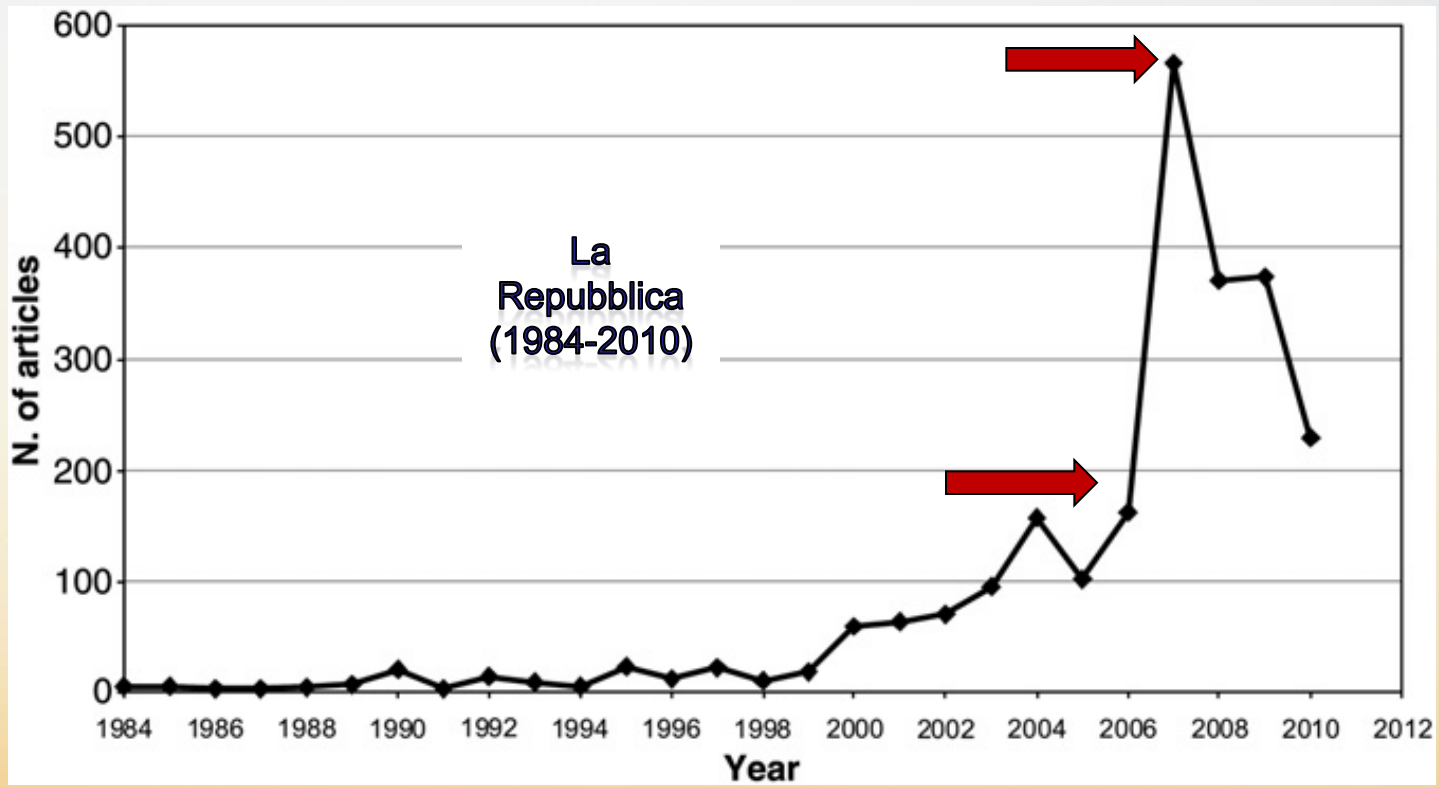
Climate change in the Italian press: 1984-2010

Slow growth up to 2006.

Spike in 2007: Nobel Peace Prize, Academy Award.

From 2008 on, number of stories dropped:

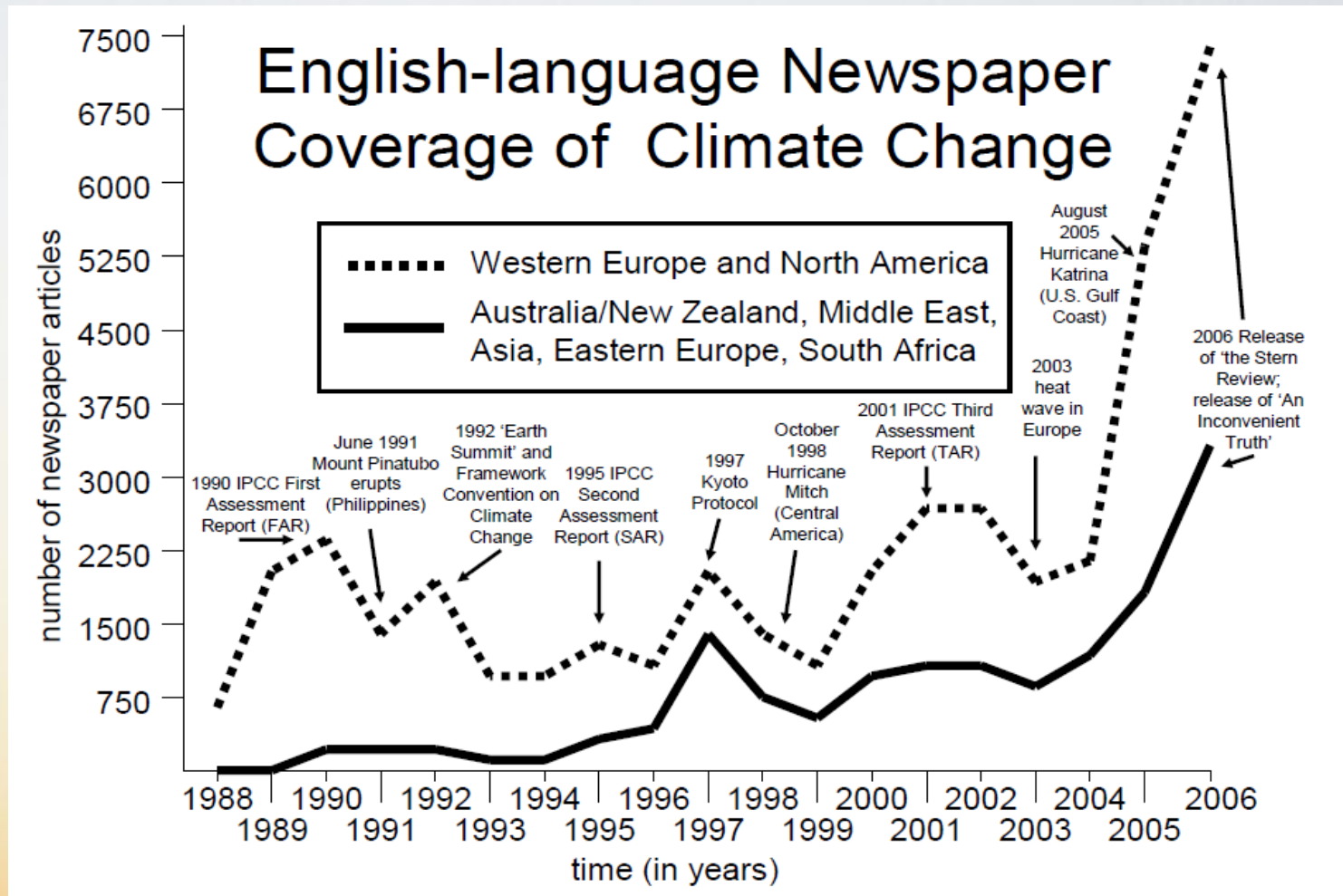
- ✓ US economic crisis, Italian recession.
- ✓ Disappointing UN negotiations



Climate change in English-language media: 1988-2006

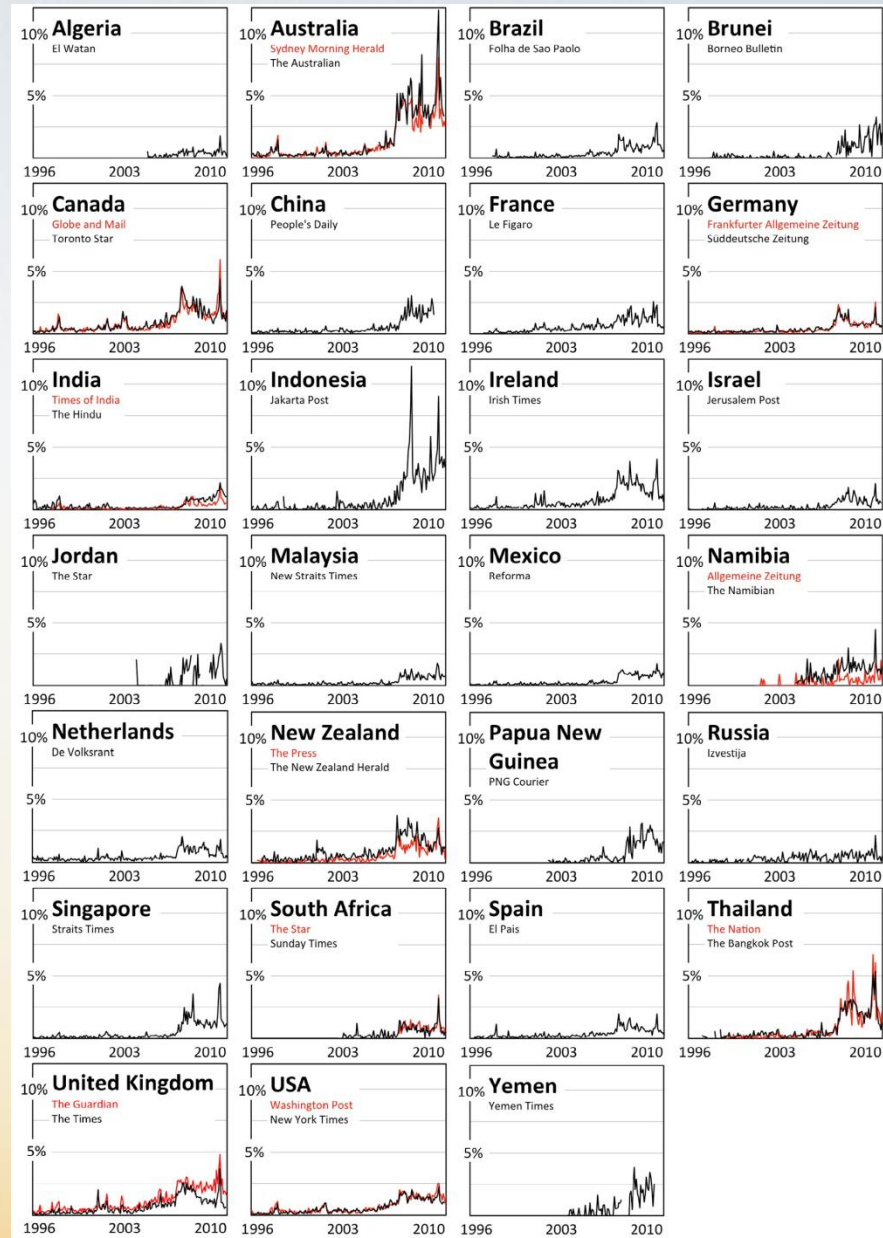
Boykoff and Roberts (2007)

Peaks in press coverage in 1992, 1997, 2001, 2006.



Climate change in the world news: a new study

Schmidt et al. (2013)
Global and Planetary
Change)



GW “contrarians” and the scientific consensus

Position	% of all abstracts	% among abstracts with AGW position (%)	% of all authors	% among authors with AGW position (%)
Endorse AGW	32.6% (3896)	97.1	34.8% (10 188)	98.4
No AGW position	66.4% (7930)	—	64.6% (18 930)	—
Reject AGW	0.7% (78)	1.9	0.4% (124)	1.2
Uncertain on AGW	0.3% (40)	1.0	0.2% (44)	0.4

From: Cook et al., 2013

Although 97.1% of climate scientists confirm human-induced GW, US public still confused....



US citizens and climate change

- ✓ Despite widespread scientific consensus, perception of part of the US public is that the scientific community still disagrees over the causes of climate change.
- ✓ From 1997 to 2007, public opinion polls indicated 60% of the US public believed there was disagreement among scientists about whether GW and CC were really happening (Nisbet and Myers 2007).
- ✓ Did the media play any role in affecting public perception?



“Contrarians” and media coverage

- ✓ First: Boykoff and Boykoff (2004) observed that in the period between 1998 and 2004, the US press used the frame of “conflict”, giving as much attention to climate change “catastrophists” as to climate change “negationists”.
- ✓ Second: the activity of contrarian lobbies such as the Heartland Institute.



Was the conflict frame used in the Italian press?

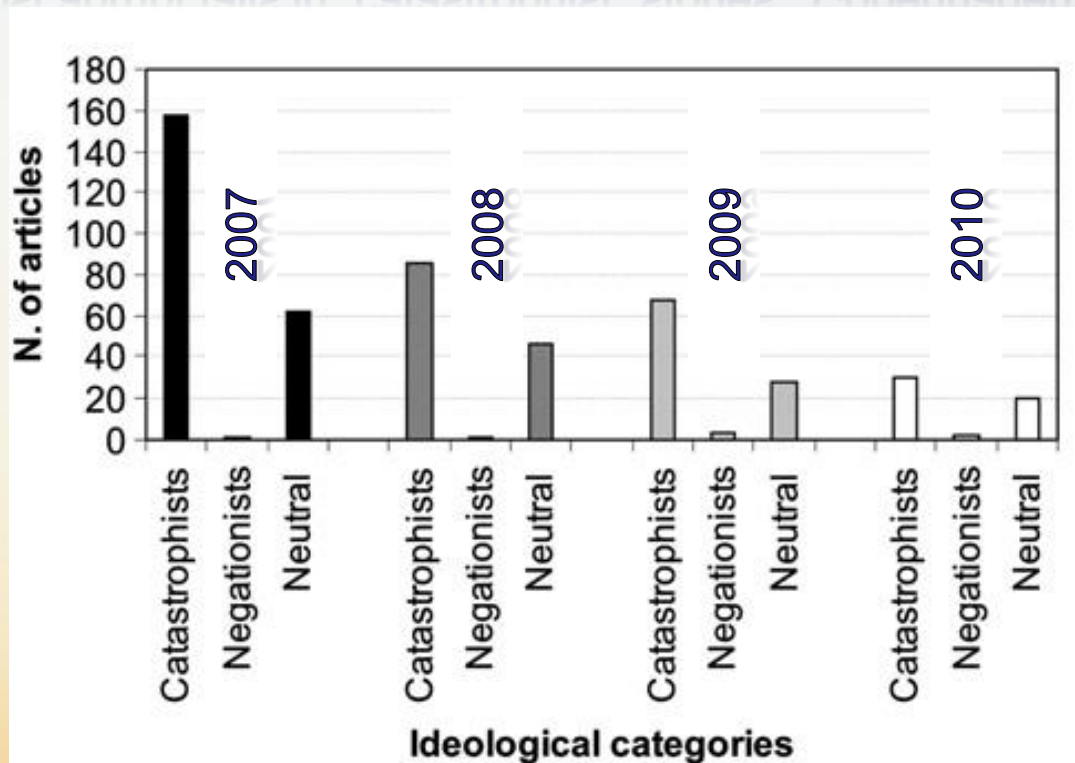
✓ We identified, in 821 news stories (2007-2010) those that covered mainly the views of “catastrophists” vs. those that mainly reported the positions of “negationists”. Also “neutral” articles were counted.

✓ *La Repubblica*: sharp decline in the number of articles.

✓ No attention at all to “negationists” .

✓ In 2008 and 2010 most abrupt falls in “catastrophist” stories: Copenhagen 2009 and “Climategate”.

503 news stories from *La Repubblica* (2007-2010)



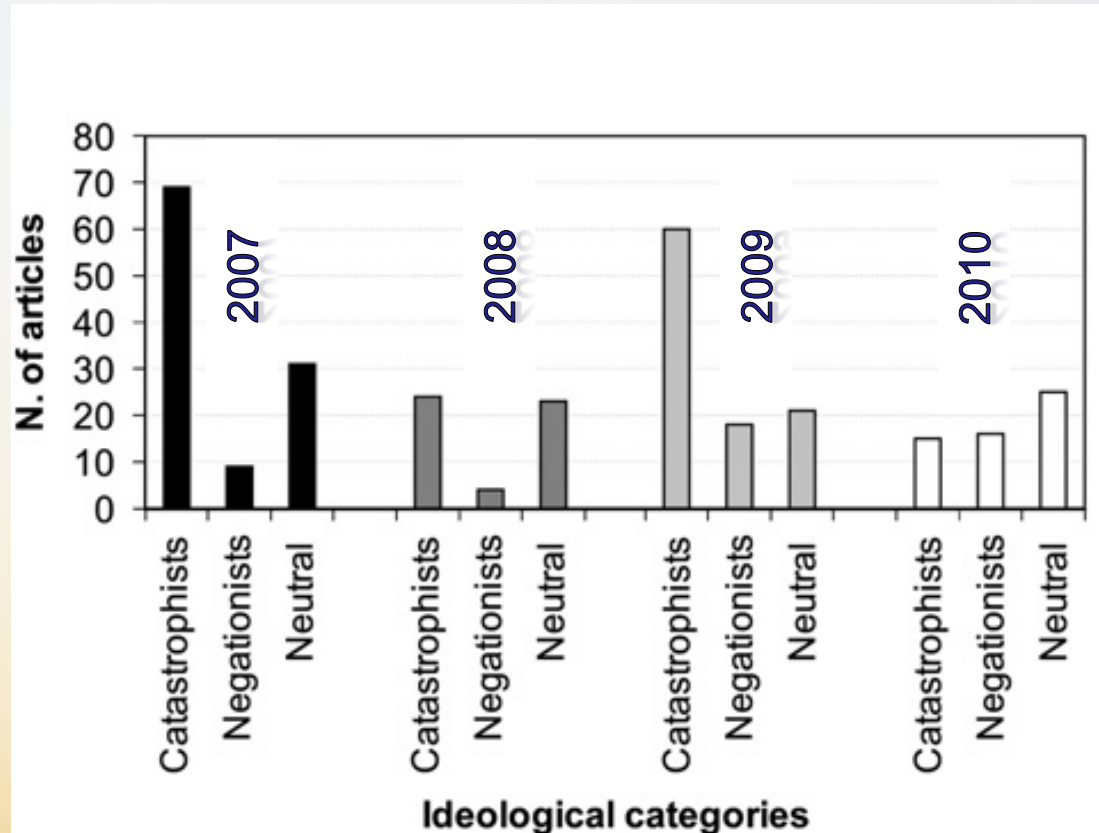
The conflict frame in the Italian press: 2007-2010

✓ Overall decrease is less marked.

✓ Progressively more attention to negationists.

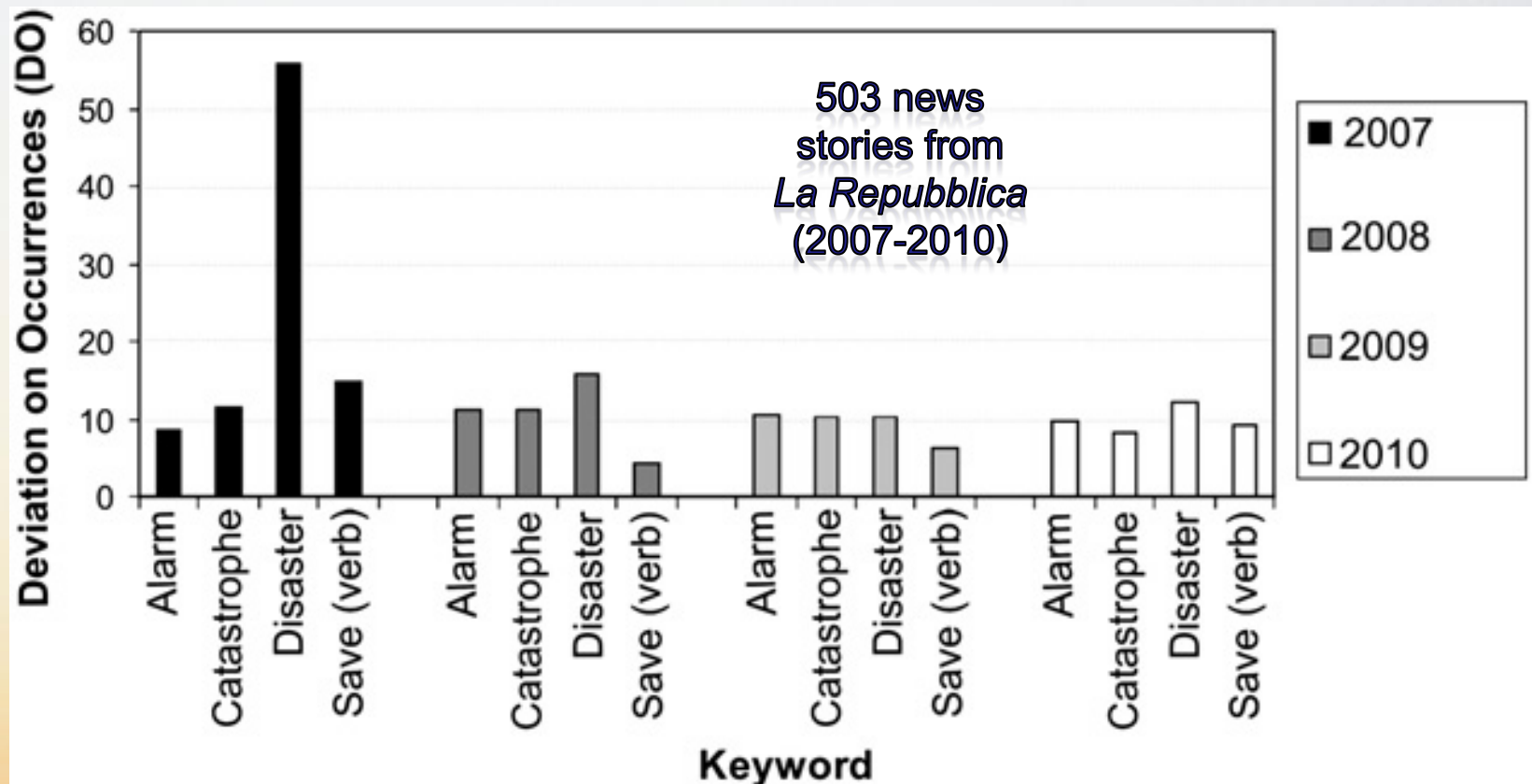
✓ In 2010, a balance is reached between stories on the two conflicting positions.

318 news stories
from
Corriere della Sera
(2007-2010)



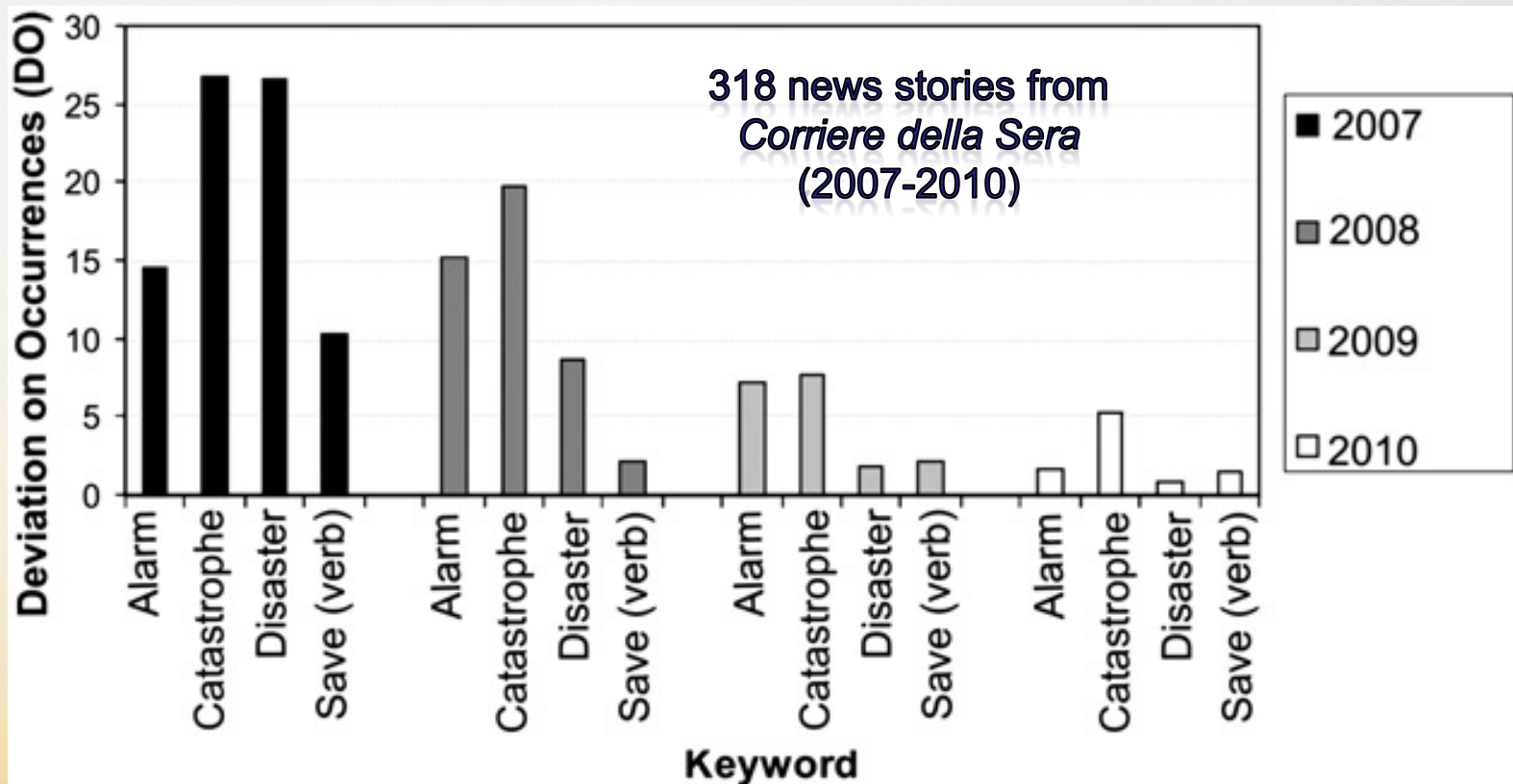
Dramatization and climate change

- ✓ We used a software (TalTac®) to analyze the relative frequency of keywords.
- ✓ Selection of keywords that convey a dramatic picture of climate change.
- ✓ *La Repubblica*: decrease in dramatization over the years.



Dramatization and climate change

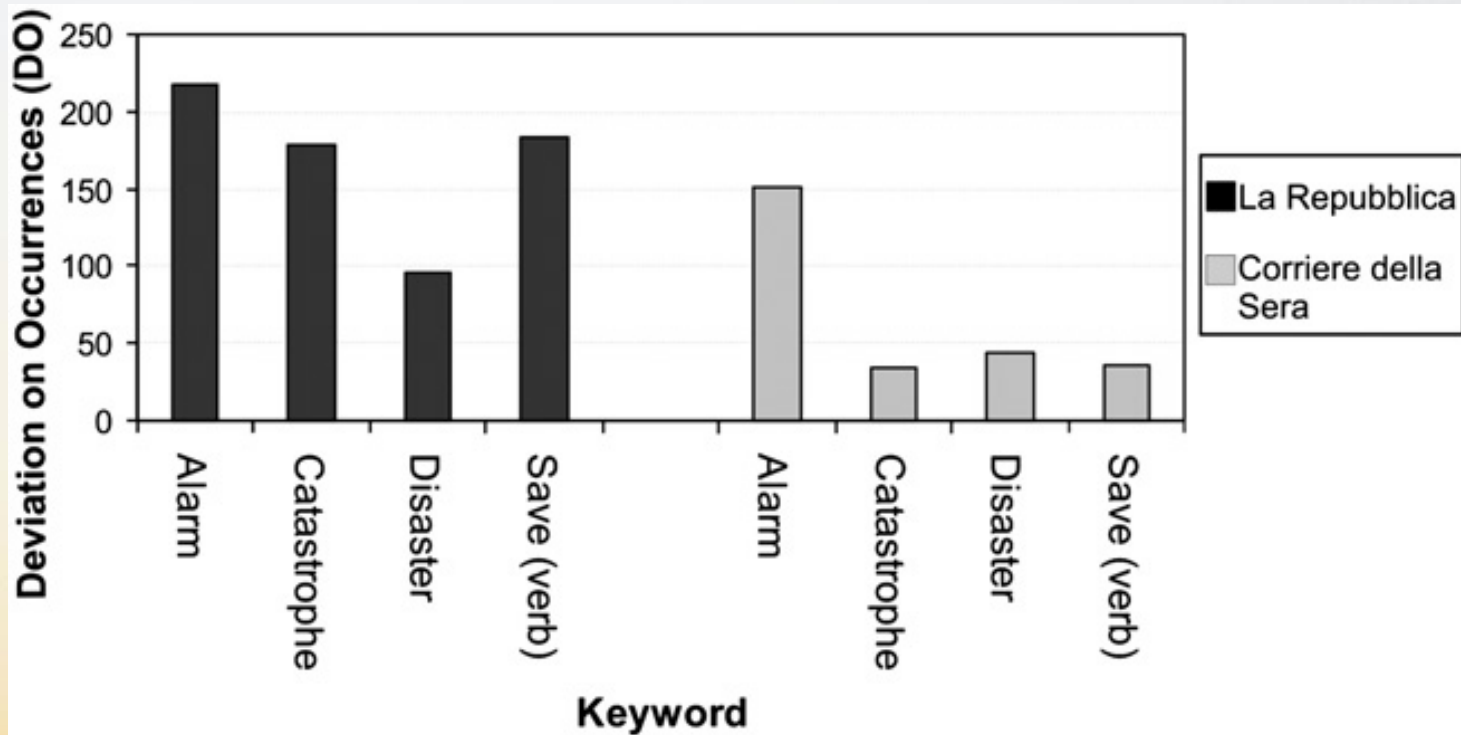
- ✓ DOs much lower if compared with *La Repubblica*.
- ✓ Consistent fall in DOs during the 4-year period.
- ✓ In 2010, dramatization was hardly ever used by *Corriere della Sera*.



Dramatization and climate change

DO figures for headlines are much higher for both media outlets.

Comparison between DOs highlights a more pronounced tendency to dramatization by *La Repubblica*.



Timing of climate change

- ✓ We documented much confusion in the Italian press as to when the effects of climate change will fully affect the Earth.
- ✓ Years cited ranged from 2020 to 2100, with peaks for year 2050 and year 2100.
- ✓ This confusion mirrors the uncertainty of the scientific community, until cutting-edge studies were published.

NEWS & VIEWS

FORUM EARTH SCIENCE

The timing of climate change

An innovative assessment of climate change calculates the year in which ongoing warming will surpass the limits of historical climate variability. Three experts explain this calculation's significance compared with conventional approaches, and its relevance to Earth's biodiversity. [SEE ARTICLE P.183](#)

Individual remediation measures

We wanted to test the media's attention to everyday-life actions that might be taken to decrease energy consumption and mitigate our contribution to global warming.

The *La Repubblica* covered this subject only in 9 news stories (1.7% of the total); the *Corriere della Sera* mentioned individual measures only in 8 articles (2.5% of the total).



Hydrogeological disasters and the media

- ✓ In 2007-2010 the Italian media did a better job in reporting on hydrogeological disasters.
- ✓ They consistently mentioned poor land management interacting with climate change forcings.
- ✓ Recent reports on the catastrophe in Sardinia confirms an evolution in the coverage of environmental risk.



Conclusions

- ✓ The two newspapers convey a quite different view of the responsibility of man in triggering climate change: the *la Repubblica* seems to fully acknowledge that man is a key-factor in producing GW and CC, and does not give any attention to the so-called “negationists”.
- ✓ The *Corriere della Sera*, on the contrary, has developed over time the tendency to amplify the role and importance of “negationists”.
- ✓ Both newspapers give a vague picture of “when” we have to expect climate change to fully impact the global environment. This reflects the correspondent uncertainty of scientists.
- ✓ Both media outlets downplay the role of individual actions to counteract global warming: this might affect the citizens' potential motivation to do so in their everyday life.

la Repubblica

VS.

CORRIERE DELLA SERA

Conclusions

✓The two newspapers appear to have different “agendas” that might have different impacts on their readerships: the readers of the *la Repubblica* are likely to be willing to do whatever it takes to support **political** actions aimed at minimizing GW and CC.

✓On the contrary, the readers of *Corriere della Sera* might develop a more attenuated perception of the risks associated to GW and CC, and therefore be **less willing** to support actions aimed at addressing them.



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Thank you for your attention

